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HUSIK'S 'HISTORY OF MEDIAEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY'

A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy. By ISAAC HUSIK,
New York: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY, 1916. pp. 1 + 462, 8vo.

THE need of a handbook of mediaeval Jewish philosophy has been keenly felt among students devoted to the study of this subject and was also generally recognized by their teachers. Somehow or other the Jewish scholars working in this field, who are, indeed, very few in number, harbored an exaggerated opinion as to the real difficulties involved in the preparation of such a work, expecting, as it appears, to have the ground more fully prepared by detailed investigations before a general and complete history was to be undertaken. Dr. Husik, while not unaware of the difficulty of the task, nevertheless set himself to the work, and with a happy sense of proportion and a full understanding of what is essential or unessential in the general economy of such a book, succeeded in presenting to the intelligent reader, Jew or Gentile, a very valuable summary of mediaeval Jewish philosophy. The general reader for whom, in the main, this book is intended, and who so far, owing to the absence of English books on the subject, had little or no knowledge of this aspect of Jewish literary activity, will, by a careful perusal of this work, be put in a position to fully appreciate the contribution of Jewish thinkers to the wide field of mediaeval philosophy. But the professional student, too, who in order to get acquainted with the main philosophic problems and ideas of the middle ages, heretofore had to plod his way through a mass of foreign literature, which often served only to deter him from his proposed work, will find in Dr. Husik's volume a systematic guide and teacher that will enable him at the very beginning of his career

to survey with comparative ease the whole field, growth, and development of mediaeval Jewish philosophy.

In order to produce a handbook of the history of Jewish philosophy, like the one before us, it is of supreme importance that the author keep strictly within the sphere of thoughts of the individual thinkers, whose ideas he is to present. He must permit these thinkers, after having freed their doctrines from all incidental matter, to speak for themselves. Unnecessary interruptions of the original writer's arguments and discussions by the insertion of the author's subjective opinion and disputable theories are bound to produce in the mind of the reader confusion rather than enlightenment. Dr. Husik shows throughout the pages of his work that he was fully conscious of this truth. He anxiously avoids all unnecessary display of learning and needless digressions into neighbouring fields, which do not strictly belong to philosophy. Instead, he follows closely the works of the mediaeval authors, epitomizing their contents with literary skill and, barring some minor points, with scientific accuracy. Occasionally, it is true, he allows himself to interrupt the presentation of the original author's views by inserting some of his observations as to the scientific value of a given doctrine or its logical or historical relation to similar doctrines held by other philosophers, and the like. But in all such cases I found Dr. Husik's remarks, aside from their being of very moderate length, to be highly instructive and a valuable help toward a better understanding of the question at issue.¹

The method of sketching the works of the mediaeval writers, as here described, naturally brought about a number of repetitions. For it is well known that certain doctrines (e.g. that of the celestial spheres and their motion, the Active Intellect, Prophecy, Divine Attributes, Free Will, &c.) had become the stock in trade of all mediaeval philosophers, Jews, Christians,

¹ It would require too much space to give here instances of such insertions. I therefore refer the interested reader to pp. 46-7, 68, 90 f., 119, 138 f., 146 f., 226, 266, 274-8, 300, 366, 395 f. There may be a few others, which escaped my notice.

and Mohammedans alike. In skimming the contents of a book it was not always possible to dismiss the parts bearing upon these doctrines by a mere reference to a previous chapter, where the matter had been dealt with in connexion with the teachings of another philosopher. For in spite of the intrinsic identity of a given doctrine in the works of two different authors, such doctrine often receives a new signification or occupies a different place within the individual systems of the respective authors, hence it must be discussed each time separately. Dr. Husik tried, however, to reduce these repetitions to a minimum, at times merely touching upon the ideas in general terms and referring for details to previous discussions (see e.g. pp. 86, 147, 162, top, 206, 224, and *passim*).

The work is divided into eighteen chapters, each dealing with one of the leading mediaeval Jewish philosophers, beginning with Isaac Israëli in the ninth century and ending with Joseph Albo of the fifteenth century. A few of the Hebrew philosophic writers later than Albo (e.g. Joseph b. Shem ʿTob and his son, Shem ʿTob, Isaac Abrabanel, and others) are treated summarily in a brief 'Conclusion' (pp. 428-32). Each chapter begins with a biographical sketch and a general characterization of the author in question, which will prove of special value to the reader who is not acquainted with the life of the mediaeval Jewish worthies. The whole is preceded by a learned introduction (xiii-1), in which the author traces briefly the early beginnings of rationalistic thought among the Jews, speaks in a general way of the principal motives of Mediaeval Jewish philosophy and its Greco-Arabic sources, classifies the individual philosophers according to their adherence either to the Kalâm, Neo-Platonism, or Aristotelianism, and, finally, sketches preliminarily the essential contents of their philosophy. The style and manner of presentation leave nothing to be desired. The author absolutely masters the philosophic language required for a clear and intelligible presentation of the abstruse problems of mediaeval philosophy, so that the intelligent reader of the book will find no difficulty in trying to understand them.

Owing to its general character the book may appeal also to non-Jewish students of philosophy and hence may enjoy the good fortune to appear at some future time in a new revised edition. I therefore deem it advisable to add here some observations which I made while going through the volume and which will perhaps prove worth considering by the author for such an edition. Before taking up, however, the discussion of the details, I wish to set aright a statement made by the author in his Preface. He there points out that while German and French scholars, particularly the former, have done distinguished work in expounding individual thinkers and problems, 'there is as yet no complete history of the subject for the student or general reader'. Completeness is a relative term. Taken absolutely, Dr. Husik's book is also incomplete, for he does not treat in it of all the problems dealt with by those philosophers to whom his book is devoted, nor does he include therein all the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages. In fact the number of philosophers selected by him for special treatment could easily be doubled, though the philosophy of those whom he omitted might not appear to every reader as being of any particular importance for the history of philosophy. Moreover, *philosophy*, too, is a very elastic conception. Men like Naḥmanides, Solomon b. Adret, Menahem Meiri, Baḥya b. Asher (all of the thirteenth century), and many others, who, of course, are not included in Dr. Husik's book, were no professional philosophers; they were neither Kalāmists nor Neo-Platonists, nor Aristotelians, but they were highly educated theologians with a rounded *Weltanschauung*, who took into account also the best philosophic thought of their predecessors and contemporaries. Their influence on Judaism, not alone in Talmudic lines, was enormous, at any rate much greater than that of many of the real philosophers, and a description of their literary achievements outside of the field of the Halakah would, therefore, have a perfectly legitimate place in a complete history of Jewish philosophy. Now an author may delimit the scope of his work as he sees fit, and one should therefore not criticize Dr. Husik, as did some of his reviewers, for not having included

in his work all the Jewish theological and Kabbalistical writers of the Middle Ages. He has confined himself to the treatment of the most prominent of those Jewish thinkers who stood exclusively under the influence of Greco-Arabic philosophy, and he has done this part well. But if we accept this point of view as correct, we cannot follow him in treating as a negligible quantity several works on the history of Jewish philosophy, published prior to his own in various European languages. Thus M. Eisler's *Vorlesungen über die jüdischen Philosophen des Mittelalters*, three parts, Vienna, 1870-1883 (mentioned by Dr. Husik in the Bibliography only), while written in the form of lectures and omitting some of the philosophers treated by Husik, is in some parts more comprehensive than the work of the latter, Maimonides alone occupying fully 140 pages. Nor can J. Spiegler's *Geschichte der Philosophie des Judenthums*, Leipzig, 1890, though scientifically insignificant, be entirely disregarded. Solomon Munk's masterful *Esquisse historique de la philosophie chez les Juifs*, embodied in his *Mélanges*, &c., pp. 461-511, 522-528, exists also in book form in a German translation with additions and amplifications by B. Beer, and in English by I. Kalisch (referred to in the *Bibliography*), and though on the whole too brief and compendious, it still contains the basic elements of a history of Jewish philosophy. Of similar import is P. Bloch's *Geschichte der Entwicklung der Kabbala und der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie*, Berlin, 1894 (reprint of *Die jüdische Religionsphilosophie* in Winter and Wünsche's *Die jüdische Litteratur*, II, 699-794). Overlooked is also the learned work of the Dutch scholar, P. J. Muller, *De Godsleer der middeleeuwse Joden*, Groningen, 1898, which contains a very clear and readable presentation of the Jewish philosophy from Saadia to Maimonides, inclusive, with an elaborate introduction (pp. 4-58) and copious notes (pp. 161-87). Finally, there is to be mentioned the more recent work, *Historia de la Filosofía española*, by Prof. Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín. According to the outline given by the author in the first volume (Madrid, 1908) the work is to appear in eight volumes, of which the second (Madrid, 1911) is devoted entirely (456 pages) to the history of Jewish philosophy in

Spain, while a considerable part of the third volume is to deal with the history of Jewish mysticism in that country (*Zohar*, &c.). As nearly all Jewish philosophers lived in Spain,² the work represents a fairly complete history of Jewish philosophy. Dr. Husik's book is thus not the first in the field, though it must be admitted that, aside from the fact that it is the first of its kind in the English language, it will also serve the purpose for which it is intended to a much higher degree than any of its predecessors.

It would be overstepping the limits of a review to point out for correction all the little details one notices in a book of over 500 pages. Here may follow some which seemed to me more important :

The 'oral law' (i.e. Mishnah and Talmud) was not counted by Saadia (introduction to *Emūnōt we-Deōt*) among 'the sources of knowledge of truth' (Husik, p. xli, top). Saadia counts there three general sources, consisting of the senses and reason, to which he adds the *Bible* as a special, fourth, source for Israelites in particular.—Saadia did not refute 'thirteen erroneous views concerning the origin and nature of the world' (*ibidem*), for one of these views, that of a *creatio ex nihilo*, is his own.—Saadia was not called to the Gaonate of Sura from Egypt (p. 1), for he had emigrated from Egypt to the Orient (Palestine and Babylonia) thirteen years prior to his appointment as Gaon. This fact has been known for the last twenty years, ever since the Genizah literature came to light, which the author should have consulted. The persistent translation of שְׁמֵי יִי by 'traditional' laws (pp. 39, 167, 203, *passim*) is misleading. It is a technical term for those Biblical laws which are not dictated by the human reason, but were ordained on Mount Sinai (as the sanctification of the Sabbath, dietary laws, &c.). The word should be translated by 'revealed', in contradistinction to 'rational' laws. Saadia borrowed the term from the Arabs and was the first to introduce it into Jewish literature.—On what ground does the author attribute to Saadia the statement that the Pan-

² The few philosophers who lived in other countries, as Israëli, Saadia, and others, are not entirely neglected by the author. Maimonides, who left Spain as a youth, occupies pp. 275-415.

theists believed in the pre-existence of the soul (p. 44)? In the text referred to there is no mention of Pantheists.—Too much emphasis is laid by the author (pp. 86, 89, 92) on Bahya's originality in his distinction between Unity as applied to God and that predicated of other existences. All the details in Bahya's arguments (p. 92) are actually found in a more concise form at the beginning of the tenth chapter of Saadia's *Emūnōt*. That Bahya's argument for the priority of unity over plurality is based on the idealism of Plato (p. 90), according to which unity and plurality are in the same relation to one another as the universal idea and the individual object, seems to be the author's own interpretation and should have been substantiated by some textual parallels. His further remarks in this connexion are quite interesting and give a new aspect to Bahya's exposition.—In the presentation of Bahya's theory of the three essential attributes of God (p. 94 f.) one misses a reference to Saadia, *Emūnōt* (ed. Josefow, II, 5), who is the source of Bahya; comp. *Emūnōt*, II, end, where even the same verse (Neh. 9. 5) is quoted in support of the theory here given by the author as that of Bahya.—The doctrine given in the name of Ibn Šaddīk (147–9) that the commandments of the Torah, like the act of our creation, are for our own good, that we may enjoy happiness in the world to come, as it would otherwise not be proper to reward us without any merit on our part, is taken over in all details from Saadia's *Emūnōt*, chaps. III–V, which should have been noted. The same applies to Ibn Šaddīk's description of the Messianic world (p. 149); see *Emūnōt*, VII–IX.—It had escaped even the notice of Munk (*Guide des Égarés*, III, 128, n. 4) that it was Saadia, who was referred to by Maimonides (*Moreh*, III, 17) as 'one of the later Geonim', who adopted the strange Mu'tazilitic view, according to which even animals are to be rewarded in the hereafter for undeserved sufferings (as slaughter, &c.) which they had to undergo in this world. Saadia actually gives clear expression to this view (*Emūnōt*, III, 10, No. 4) and Munk's mistake was pointed out by Steinschneider (*Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, pp. 337, 356, top). Dr. Husik, overlooking Saadia, takes Ibn Šaddīk as the authority for the doctrine in question (p. 149).

In treating of Maimonides (p. 292) and later on of the Karaite Aaron b. Elijah (p. 377) he again reverts to the matter without noticing its origin. The Saadianic origin was to be noted also with regard to Ibn Šaddik's contention (p. 149) that little children, who are without sin, will likewise be recompensed in the world to come for their sufferings in this world; comp. *Emūnōt*, VIII, 2; IX, 2, end. Such omissions are regrettable; for in a history of philosophy, as in the historical presentation of any subject, it is of special importance not only to reproduce with accuracy the seemingly detached theories of its various exponents, but to try to uncover the inner relations of the latter to one another. Dr. Husik does that quite often, especially in discussing the larger problems, but not often enough.

That Judah Halevi was ready to admit the eternity of matter, if reason should demand it, is not so certain as the author (p. 150) believes. He is unaware of the divergent interpretations given by recent scholars to the passage in the *Kuzari* (I, 67), upon which he bases his statement; see Kaufmann, *Attributenlehre*, p. 138, n. 56; *idem*, *MGWG.*, XXXIII (1884), 208-14; and Hirschfeld, *ib.*, p. 374.—That Terah was 'important' because of his son Abraham (p. 163), is not the idea Judah Halevi (*Kuzari*, I, 95) wishes to convey. On the contrary he admits that Terah, as others in the generations between Noah and Abraham, was devoid of the divine spirit, hence unimportant. But Abraham was not the continuator of the spirit of Terah, his father, but of that of Eber, in whose college, tradition says (s. Megillah, 17 a), he studied.—'By a fortunate discovery of S. Landauer we are enabled to follow Judah Halevi's source with the certainty of eye-witnesses' (p. 175). The discoverer was not Landauer, but Steinschneider, whose remarks regarding Halevi's source had escaped Landauer's notice (see Steinschneider, *Hebräische Uebersetzungen*, p. 18, n. 21; cp. Kaufmann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 10, n. 2).—The translation of סכלים (Arabic جُهلاء) by 'fools' (pp. 243-4) is in all instances incorrect. Maimonides does not speak there of fools, but of people who are *ignorant* in the field of philosophy or metaphysics, though they may be learned in other

fields.—It should have been noted that the five causes enumerated by Maimonides as preventing people from the study of metaphysics (pp. 244 f.) are taken with very slight modifications from the end of Saadia's introduction to the *Emūnōt*.—That Maimonides had 'no idea of the Alexandrian School and of the works of Philo' (p. 268) is too venturesome an assertion. While it is true that Philo is not mentioned in mediaeval Jewish literature by name, his influence upon that literature is not subject to doubt (see Steinschneider. *JQR.*, XV, 394, especially Poznański, *REJ.*, L (1905), 10, 26–31; cp. also Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria*, Jena, 1875, pp. 299–302). The earlier Ḳaraïtes in particular show acquaintance with Philo, who is also meant by 'the Alexandrian' referred to by Ḳirḳisāni (cp. *JQR.*, N. S., I, p. 395).—The reason advanced by Maimonides for the Biblical prohibition against mixing divers seeds, or wearing garments made of a mixture of wool and flax, is, that such mixing was the custom of the idolaters and their priests. Moses, in his desire to wean the Israelites away from all idolatrous customs, therefore thought its prohibition necessary, though the custom in itself may be considered harmless. Dr. Husik, not satisfied with Maimonides' reason, suggests another one (p. 302). 'Why not say', he asks, 'the ancient Hebrews were forbidden to mix divers seeds because they had been from time immemorial taught to believe that there was something sinful in joining together what God has kept asunder; and in order not to shock their sensibilities too rudely the new religion let them have these harmless notions in order by means of these to inculcate real truth?' This is, indeed, rationalizing with a vengeance, and I doubt that the reader will find that Dr. Husik has here improved upon Maimonides.—Gersonides' view that God's creation was timeless, that the six days of the Bible are not to be taken literally, but as indicating the natural order and rank of the things in existence (p. 357), is not original with him. It was taught centuries before him by Saadia in his Commentary on the Book *Yeṣirah*; see M. Lambert, *Commentaire sur le Séfer*

Yesira, Paris, 1891, Arabic text, pp. 11-12, 87, French, pp. 27, 109.—‘Ha-Maor’ is not a proper name (p. 363) but an honorary title of the Ḳaraite in question, derived from the name of his main work. He is known by the name of Ḳirḳisāni, which the author wrongly puts in parentheses.—The various views held by the Ḳaraite Aaron b. Elijah with regard to reward and punishment in this world or in the world to come, as well as his reasons for the sufferings of Job (pp. 376-8) did not originate with Aaron himself, nor with the Ḳaraites preceding him. They are all to be found in Saadia’s *Emūnōt*, V, 2-3, and more especially in the introduction to his commentary on Job (ed. Bacher, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V, Paris, 1899).—What is the source for the author’s assertion that ‘the Rabbis of the Middle Ages were inclined to recognize’ Christianity’s claim that Jesus performed miracles (p. 415)? For statements of such importance the sources should always be given; cp. Saadia, *Emūnōt*, III, 8, who disputes the claim to miracles by the founders of the non-Jewish religions.

Simon Duran deserved a better place than that allotted to him by the author in a note of a few lines (p. 447), the more so as the author there states that Joseph Albo, to whose philosophy he devotes a special chapter of twenty-two pages, ‘owes the central point of his contribution to Duran’, whom he (Albo) never quotes, and that ‘the charge of plagiarism brought against him is not far from justified’. Why then act against one’s own better insight?

The Notes of Dr. Husik, I regret to say, are not quite satisfactory. The book before us, though it takes into account the needs of the general reader, is destined to be used by students of philosophy, who are interested in the subject from a scientific point of view. In the Hebrew works, epitomized by the author, a large number of questions are dealt with, the discussion of which Dr. Husik, for one reason or another, could not or would not include in his presentation. Many of these questions may be neither Platonic nor Aristotelian, and the like, but their

solutions were part of the philosophic systems of the mediaeval authors, and the ideas therein involved often had a decisive influence upon their entire circle of thoughts. For brevity's sake I shall illustrate these remarks by only one point. Saadia, in the introduction to the third chapter of the *Emūnōt*, lays special stress on the publicity attaching to the miracles related in the Torah and on the uninterruptedness of Jewish tradition. This idea was seized upon by most of the mediaeval writers, using it as a weapon in their controversies with Christian and Moham-medan opponents. Judah Halevi actually builds his entire philosophy on this idea, and Abraham ibn Daud gives it much prominence (אמונה רמה, pp. 80 f.; cp. Guttman, *Die Religions-philosophie des Saadia*, p. 147, n. 3). In the chapter on Saadia, Dr. Husik does not mention the matter at all, nor is the idea of the continuity of Jewish tradition properly brought out even in the chapter on Halevi (see pp. 158, 162: 'the chain of individuals from Adam to Moses and thereafter was a *remarkable* one of godly men'. It is not a question of being remarkable; Halevi wishes only to emphasize uninterrupted continuity). Only when he reaches Abraham Ibn Daud the author reproduces the gist of the latter's argument from the continuity of Jewish tradition (p. 227, bottom) without, however, bringing out its historical importance and its relation to Saadia and Halevi. It was in the Notes appended to the book that the author could have disposed of much valuable material. In most instances a mere allusion to the existence of such material, and a reference to where the student should look for further information, would have been sufficient. The summary mentioning of some recent book on Saadia or Maimonides, &c., at the beginning of the respective chapter cannot make up for this deficiency, nor can the selected Bibliography, or the brief references to the pages of the Hebrew texts upon which the author's expositions are based serve such purpose. Assuming, as I do, that Dr. Husik's book will be widely used by students of colleges and universities, as, indeed, it should be, I cannot share the optimism he expresses in the

Preface (p. viii) that it will do the professional student good 'to get less' than he wants. The student, the man of research, is always glad to receive even more than he has expected, and Dr. Husik, with his perfect mastery of the subject, with his splendid ability of presentation, was fully equipped to give it.

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